Epidemic Information Exchange (Epi-X)

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?
The urgency of outbreaks, terrorist events, toxic exposures, and other acute public health events underscores the critical need for a reliable and accurate communications tool that supplies public health officials with up-to-the-minute alerts, reports, and assistance. A secure, Web-based communications network for public health investigation and response simplifies and expedites the exchange of routine and emergent public health information between CDC and other health agencies.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?
In December 2000, CDC launched the *Epidemic Information Exchange* (*Epi-X*) as the nation's secure, Web-based communications network for public health investigation and response. *Epi-X* provides public health officials throughout the United States with up-to-the-minute information, reports, alerts, and discussions about terrorist events, toxic exposures, disease outbreaks, and other public health events. When public health officials post reports to *Epi-X*, the information is shared rapidly with public health officials across many states and jurisdictions, and this sensitive information is encrypted and secure from access by outside sources. Since its launch, *Epi-X* has posted more than 1000 reports of disease outbreaks, other new public health activities, and requests for epidemiologic assistance from CDC. As of August 2002, more than 1000 federal, state, and local epidemiologists; laboratorians; and other designated health scientists use *Epi-X* to

- find, notify, and communicate with colleagues and experts instantly about urgent public health events across a secure, encrypted, Web-based network.
- create reports to track information for outbreak investigations and response;
- create online conferences to disseminate and discuss topics such as terrorism response, anthrax investigations, and West Nile virus (WNV) activity;
- research outbreaks and unusual health events through a flexible search interface;
- alert health officials by pager, phone, and e-mail of urgent events;
- customize their home pages, information, and options based on their specific needs;
- request assistance to investigate epidemics from CDC online; and
- communicate simultaneously with command centers at HHS, CDC, and all state and large metropolitan bioterrorism response programs.

Example of program in action: By September 11, 2001, *Epi-X* had established secure communication between CDC and all state health departments. During events following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, *Epi-X* provided local CDC investigative teams, state epidemiologists, and other public health officials a secure forum for posting and discussing newly emerging information as well as for receiving information from CDC. *Epi-X* immediately notified state epidemiologists by pager and phone of the first anthrax case in New York City. *Epi-X* posted 90 reports related to the public health response to the terrorist attacks of Fall 2001.
During Summer 2002, *Epi-X* posted more than 35 reports per week of new WNV activity throughout the United States, verified media reports for health officials, and provided secure discussion for WNV surveillance teams and laboratorians nationwide.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?
Epi-X is expanding secure public health communications capacity at the national level. To reach its full potential, *Epi-X* will increase the base of designated users to assure rapid secure communications at all levels of the public health and safety work force. *Epi-X* plans to support state level systems that link to national *Epi-X*, integrate more closely with disease monitoring systems, provide improved secure communications for response teams in the field, and provide intelligence about international outbreaks that might affect the public health in the United States.
For further information about this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.   *September 2002*